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'Anthropologists of our own experience': Taxonomy and Testimony in *The Museum of Innocence* and *The Virgin Suicides*

Clare Hayes-Brady

1. Lovers

1 Talking about his 2008 novel *The Museum of Innocence*, Orhan Pamuk noted that "the desire to gather objects is central to the human heart" (Pamuk 2015). Pamuk's heartbroken, obsessive protagonist spends decades amassing a collection of small objects associated with the lover — now dead — whom he gave up during his engagement to another woman. The wealthy Kemal, who has opened a museum to his doomed love consisting of these objects, recounts their brief affair and his subsequent descent into harmless but certain obsession with his cousin, Füsun. The narrative is couched as a kind of museum tour, with the story related by reference to the objects on display. Pamuk has actually opened a physical *Museum of Innocence* in Istanbul, blurring the boundaries further between the fictional Kemal and Füsun and the real Istabul in which their narrative unfolds. In Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides*, a similar affect is displayed: the collective voice of a group of adolescent boys who have grown into a desultory, unsatisfying (but, importantly, well-to-do) adulthood describes their confusion and trauma following the suicides of their neighbours, the five Lisbon sisters, over the course of just over a year. This narrative is also bedded into a collection — albeit a much less formal one — of objects associated with the girls, which the boys — now men — display as evidence of their search for meaning in the girls' deaths. Like Pamuk's later novel, *The Virgin Suicides* positions a fictional coming-of-age story against the backdrop of a radically changing social landscape, engaging with the real social change of the time through the narrative operation of the texts. One of the primary sites of this engagement is in the changing attitudes of young men to the young women

upon whom they focus their stories, and particularly how the deaths of the girls in question comes to reflect a social loss of innocence.

2 Written almost two decades apart, the novels have a number of central features in common. Both narratives use material objects as both narrative touchstones and as totems of their various beloveds. Both focus on reminiscences by middle-aged men of a youthful infatuation turned into a lifelong obsession, culminating in a material memorialisation of the dead. The narrators are wealthy and from "good" families, and the object(s) of affection are part of their social circle, but socioeconomically inferior to them. Both novels chart the decline of their surroundings as a backdrop to their love affairs, specifically Detroit's industrial decline in the 1970s and the Istanbul coup of 1980. Most relevant for the purposes of the present essay are three things: the curious absence, shared by both novels, of interiority in the girls; the fact that the deaths of the young women are by suicide (this is adverted to in *The Museum of Innocence*, although it is much less definite than in *The Virgin Suicides*, which has implications for our discussion here that will be explored later), and the remarkably passive behaviour of the boys throughout their relationships with the girls. Key to any comparison of the two texts is the nature of the material testimony of both narrators and what it suggests about the relationships of subject and object in the novels. Grounded in Baudrillard's theory of the nature of collection, this essay examines the ways in which the male protagonists — and they are the protagonists, notwithstanding the obsessive foregrounding of their love — use these everyday objects to try to fix the memory of their lovers as still, tractable images, arguing that this use of proxy objects signals a desire to possess rather than to love. Further, I argue that these forms of memorialisation and their narration privilege the body as both object of desire and site of memory, occluding the subjectivity of the young women memorialised, especially by their association with physical rather than metaphysical touchstones. By offering a post-mortem memorialisation of this kind, the narrators appropriate the image of their beloved(s), re-presenting them as objects among objects, albeit still the object of mystery and obsessive fascination. The fundamental narcissism of the protagonists is made clear by the use of imagery, particularly the language of film, to describe the girls, a narcissism that reflects an inability to see the female as anything other than object. In this respect the essay draws on the work of Butler, Cavell and Nussbaum in their investigations of the meaning of recognition and objectification, and the cataclysmic othering of the female. Lastly, the essay explores the narrative strategies used by both authors, and separately by the narrative voices, that draw the reader, positioned as witness, into the position of voyeur, devolving the responsibility of testimony on to the interlocutor, the "you" of both narratives. This devolution inculcates the reader in the uncomfortable but inevitable narrative occlusion of the female subject, challenging common representations of romantic love, particularly adolescent love. The reader's operational complicity in the narrative construction develops into an ethical complicity in seeing the girls as the narrators see them, perpetuating their position as objects among objects, fixing their bodies as their essential sites of meaning, and robbing them of agency and will.

2. Collectors

3 The figure of a lovelorn swain who becomes attached to a mundane object — a pencil, a scarf, a cigarette butt — because he associates it with his beloved is a common one, too common to draw a conclusive picture of here. This is a stalwart of the romantic tale: knights going to battle hold their ladies' favours dear; Heathcliff seeks to attain Catherine after her death by collection; poor Harriet Smith attaches herself to a pencil and a length of bandage that has been in the hands of the man she fancies herself in love with; there is the horrible Hollywood cliché of the item of clothing discarded or abandoned by the departed beloved. In *Le Système des objets [The System of Objects]*, Baudrillard writes on the nature of collection, drawing a distinction between objects to be utilised and objects to be possessed. "Possession cannot apply to an implement, since the object I utilise always directs me back to the world. Rather, it applies to that object once it is *divested of its function and made relative to a subject*" (Baudrillard 7). In other words, the abstraction of an object from its utilitarian to its sentimental purpose fundamentally alters the nature of the object, making it a symbol in the subject's own relationship to himself, or as Baudrillard puts it, "his personal microcosm". Collecting, according to this description, is fundamentally narcissistic, self-directed, motivated by the desire for individuation rather than by any inherent regard for the objects. This is relatively uncontroversial when applied to the kind of collection Baudrillard is describing — philately or lepidoptery, phillumeny, arctophily — the list of harmless attachments goes on. However, it becomes a little more complicated when we begin to talk about collections associated with people. Also familiar in contemporary culture is the image of the stalker, male or female, or even the (usually male) killer, who takes items associated with, belonging to or literally from the (usually female) object of focus as trophies. This more sinister element of collection exists along a spectrum, sharing its roots with the concept of possession — and right to possession — that underlies much of what is termed rape culture; the idea that the female body exists for masculine access and control, iterated at varying levels of intensity from relatively mild (women being chided for not smiling) to serious aggression and violence.

4 Writing about sexual objectification, Nussbaum highlights the importance of context, pointing out that while the denial of subjectivity and autonomy inherent in the objectification of the other *can* lead to violation, fungibility and radical ownership, it *need* not. Her example is of lying in bed with a lover using his stomach as a pillow, which she judges to be morally "not at all baneful", provided that it does not cause him pain and that it is done "in the context of a relationship in which he is generally treated as more than a pillow. This suggests that what is problematic is not instrumentalisation *per se*, but treating someone *primarily* or *merely* as an instrument" (265). The boundaries of problem in this area form the remainder of Nussbaum's thoughtful essay — and indeed it is important to keep in mind that abusive or problematic objectification is possible even with good intentions; while the protagonists of the novels in question are not violent, nor overtly hostile to feminine subjectivity, their blindness to the agency and desires of their beloveds is contextually deeply problematic, since, as Nussbaum warns, it involves the girls being primarily or merely instrumental to the protagonists' self-images. To put it another way, the positively-inflected form of objectification is still another point on this same spectrum of control, the misogyny of the pedestal. The use of mythic language, the collection of

talismanic objects and the memorialisation of the body all serve to dehumanise the girls, reducing them to a collection of symbols for interpretation. The memorial or testimonial collections of the two novels exist as a kind of key to knowledge of the girls, both sexual and metaphysical, with that knowledge functioning as a kind of possession; by collecting these objects, the male protagonists seek to know and thereby possess the memories of their deceased lovers. In this way, the collections are indeed a kind of adolescent sexual narcissism, a reflection of their own desires rather than associated in any meaningful way with the real lives of their subjects. Indeed, the collections of the two narrators are both associated specifically and explicitly with the sexual and romantic attachment of their younger selves, and particularly with the burgeoning sexual agency of the young women. It is notable, for example, that many of the items mentioned are associated with the body — cigarette butts, toothbrushes and tampons being some examples. Interestingly, while Kemal collects cigarette butts initially belonging to Füsun, he moves on to collecting discarded cigarette butts in general, symbolising waste and the passage of time, but also highlighting the discardability of the actual, bodily Füsun to his symbology of narcissistic identification. This fixation implicitly places Füsun — or her body, at least — within this system of transactional relations, a systematisation further highlighted by the consistent narrative focus on Füsun's physicality. The collections that memorialise the dead — Pamuk's Museum of Innocence, and Eugenides' Record of Physical Evidence — are ways of shaping their physical absence. The male narrators have no access to the interior lives of the women they profess to love, and do not particularly seem bothered by this. Kemal's Museum is almost explicitly a museum to himself; he mourns not the loss of his lover but the loss of a particular vision of himself, and refers to himself and those similarly engaged in memorial as "anthropologist[s] of [our] own experience[s]" (Pamuk 2010: 39). The process of memorialisation is specifically reflective and constitutive of the memorialising subject, not the object of memorial. The boys, grown into men, do not want the Lisbon sisters back; they want to understand, to explain and demystify their actions in order to shed light on their own adolescent confusion. It is the idea of these girls that haunts the men, nothing of the girls themselves. The girls are characters rather than actors, *loci* of projection and reflection.

5 The male protagonists in both texts show the same taxonomic tendency during the lifetimes of the girls, seeking to bring them into a logical system characterised by commerce. Garofalo argues that "sexual desire and commodity culture speak to the same logic" (2) noting particularly the use of gifts as a form of communication between lovers. Kemal showers Füsun with gifts throughout the long aftermath of their affair, which are never reciprocated and very seldom even acknowledged; she does not need to give him gifts, as he is already emotionally bound to her. Hyde notes the broader cultural function of gifts as an exchange of obligation; we might consider Kemal as what Hyde rather uncouthly terms an "Indian giver" — that is, one who gives in order to bind the receiver in a relationship of obligation, which Hyde ascribes to the Native-American population. Similarly, in *The Virgin Suicides*, when the boys are permitted to take the Lisbon sisters to a school dance, only Lux is identified as a specific individual, to be escorted by Trip Fontaine. The other four sisters, an indistinguishable — or at least undistinguished — collective, are divided up among the remaining boys, with the pairings decided by the presentation of corsages: "whichever Lisbon girl a boy pinned became his date" (118). On the one hand, it is by presenting a gift that the relationship of obligation or connection is established, but on the other hand, there is a

deliberateness to the phrasing of this that suggests something more — "whichever girl a boy *pinned*". The use of the term pinned is evocative of collecting — we might think of butterflies pinned to a board by a lepidopterist. Furthermore, the phrasing robs the girls of any vestige of subjectivity, fixing them as objects for manipulation and display rather than as partners in a relationship, however fledgling. The Lisbon girls and Füsun are relegated by these gifts to objects in a transaction, rather than subjects with desires and autonomous will: they become embodied objects, prizes rather than people.

3. Watchers

6 Both novels are recounted to a (mostly) silent interlocutor as a nostalgic story of youth, and the positioning of the girls as objects of memory is the most obviously distancing strategy, but it is clear that the process of turning the girls into objects of collection begins long before there is a death to mourn, and operates at several different levels throughout the text. The interactions of the boys with the girls in both texts are formulaic and unreflective, with the primary object being sex — achieved in *The Museum of Innocence* and mostly unmanaged in *The Virgin Suicides*, with the exception of Trip Fontaine's hurried encounter with Lux. Indeed, the primary sense in both narratives is sight. In both texts, male sight is closely linked with both sexual knowledge and restrictive control, while female sight is destabilising, emasculating and surprising. The visuality and physicality of the narrative descriptions, as well as the consistent bodily focus of the characterisations of the girls, clearly marks the narrative objective as sexual rather than romantic: "all lace and ruffle, bursting with their fructifying flesh" (6), they are not presented as human girls so much as living dolls. The boys do not wonder what the girls are thinking; it does not appear to occur to them that the girls might be thinking at all, in a kind of pre-mirror stage failure to recognise object permanence.

7 It is common in criticism of *The Virgin Suicides* to discuss the constitutive male gaze — Cardullo notes of the Lisbon sisters that "their existence is conferred on them only by the male gaze" (4) and Shostak comments on "the male gaze turned on beautiful, doomed females" (809). The voyeurism of the very concept of the Museum of Innocence is heightened by the persistently visual descriptions of the young Füsun, descriptions of light and shadow rather than flesh and blood. One of the recurring plotlines in the story is the use of advertising in Muslim culture, specifically the use of a beautiful woman's image in the sale of the first locally produced soft-drink, a shorthand for Westernization. Kemal's friend Zaim owns and advertises Meltem fruit soda, and may or may not be romantically involved with the German model, Inge, whose image is used to advertise it. Inge herself disappears around page 126, but mentions of her image persist throughout the novel up to page 505, and the advertisement itself is a significant element of Kemal's collection. Inge symbolises the loose, available Western woman and/or market, by contrast with the supposedly chaste, elusive Turkish woman. Inge's ad challenges Turkish self-imagination: she is an absolute object — merely an image of a woman — but the directness of her returned gaze hints at the possibility of subjectivity, by contrast with the more traditional practice of a demure averted gaze. The fact that the returned gaze most commonly referred to in the novel is both a Western woman and a facsimile of a gaze doubly distances her from Kemal's reality, troubling him little but emerging at moments of voyeurism or shame in the text,

disrupting his imagination of his own masterful gaze. Füsun, the object of Kemal's affection, is censured by Istanbul's elite for entering a beauty contest; his mother asks "can there be anyone in this country who doesn't know what kind of girl, what kind of woman, enters a beauty contest?" Kemal muses "It was my mother's way of suggesting that Füsun had begun to sleep with men" (9). Opening oneself up to the gaze of others, then, is equated with threatening sexual agency.

8 *The Virgin Suicides* is also a strikingly visual text, predicated on small-town voyeurism. Interestingly, though, despite the constant references to watching and seeing — "we watched him. We watched Cecilia Lisbon watching" (17) — the boys seem genuinely surprised to find, late in the narrative, that the girls have been "looking out at us as intensely as we had been looking in" (119), that their "surveillance had been so focused we missed nothing but a simple returned gaze" (193). Like Kemal, the boys are untroubled by the notion that the girls may have the agency to return a gaze; the sisters exist as flattened images, not as autonomous subjects. The girls are repeatedly described in photographic or cinematic terms, distanced from the real. Early in the text, the narrative voice recalls "the two parents, leached of color like photographic negatives, and then the five glittering daughters" (8). On the novel's first page the paramedic grumbles "This ain't TV folks" (1). Cecilia's death is described as a tableau, and central to the Record of Physical Evidence presented by the boys are the family photos, which they took from the house. The coroner's report, reporting on "deaths as unreal as the news" wrote of the girls' bodies as "'like something behind glass. Like an exhibit.'" (216) Especially striking is the perpetual use of the language of popular culture, in general, and film, in particular, to describe the girls in both novels. Television reporters become "custodians of the girls' lives" (219). The night of the triple suicide that leave Mary the only surviving sister, the television in the house is described as sitting "at an angle, with the screen removed" (203), and the girls' bodies are positioned in attitudes familiar from films — Bonnie's legs coming into view, disembodied, Lux in the car, Therese with her head in the oven. The dawn of Mary's suicide, the final one of the novel, as the boys leave the debutante ball that marks their tentative ascent to adulthood, is described as "a bleachy fade-in, overused through the years now by the one-note director" (231), the town as an "overexposed photograph" (237). Mary herself, dead of an overdose in the house, "had on so much makeup that the paramedics had the odd feeling she had already been prepared for viewing" which "reminded some people of Jackie Kennedy's widow's weeds" (232). The final procession "called to mind the solemnity of a national figure being laid to rest" (232); these memories are mediated through televisual culture, the flattest kind of objectification.

9 Similarly, in *The Museum of Innocence*, relationships are subordinate to images of relationships; Kemal's relationship with Füsun after her marriage is predicated on his investment in her husband's screenplay, with Füsun as the putative star. Füsun's somewhat doltish husband is an unpromising but dedicated screenwriter and Kemal agrees to invest in his film, only because it legitimises his time with Füsun. The time they spend together is also centred around television and film, from the evenings in her parents' house watching television, which is used as the pretext upon which Kemal spends virtually every evening for eight years in this way, to the trips to the cinema and meditations on the state of Turkish indigenous filmmaking, including discussions of censorship, the moral status of actors and the political dimensions of national cinema. Mostly, though, Füsun is described as looking like or being taken for a film star, a term used so often it seems to have its own definition within the novel. Indeed, at one

point, two young boys ask Füsun if they have seen her in a film, and the narrator observes that this is a common form of romantic approach in the Istanbul of the time. Tellingly, Füsun harbours specific ambitions around stardom, implicitly viewing it as a means of independence, which ties her once again to the threatening, Western Inge. Füsun, then, is implicated in a complex desire for the constitutive male gaze, which could be either complicit or rebellious, but which is only fleetingly alluded to; this developing individual spirit is couched in terms of Westernisation throughout the text. Although this movement is expressed at various points in the narrative, it is not clear to the narrator, who sees her stardom only in terms of his management and curation of it, again claiming ownership of her body's image and actuality. Despite Füsun's developing subjectivity, Kemal continues to see only her objecthood; he looks at an object, but he does not see a subject.

10 In this regard, Shostak draws on Peter Brooks' concept of "the body as an epistemophilic project" (5) in modern Western narrative, in which he contends that "the body furnishes the building blocks of symbolization" (xiv). Discussing the body "defined radically by its sexuality", Brooks argues that "representation of the body in signs endeavours to make the body present, but always within the context of its absence" (8), which offers a useful description of the curatorships of both novels: the absent bodies of the girls, symbolised and signified into abstraction, are brought under the control of the signifying subjects — the male protagonists — and what Brooks calls "the subtending dynamic of stories and their telling becomes oriented towards knowledge and possession of the body" (8). A psychoanalytic reading of these two novels is certainly tempting — Brooks takes as axiomatic that the desire to possess and the desire to know are "intermingled, sometimes indistinguishable" (11), and argues that in Western discourse at least, "Man as knowing subject postulates woman's body as the object to be known, by way of an act of visual inspection that claims to reveal the truth — or else makes that object into the ultimate enigma" (97). However, Brooks confuses the matter here a little; the implication of that final clause is that if the bodily object cannot be known it must be mythologized, which is a nicely blame-free reading. There are a number of non-Western commonalities between the novels that challenge this idea. The distinctions between forms of gaze in *The Museum of Innocence* differentiate the modesty of Turkish girls and the vulgar display of Western and Westernised femininity. In *The Virgin Suicides*, too, the men recollect that whenever they saw the Lisbon sisters, "their faces looked indecently revealed, as though we were used to seeing women in veils" (5). Trip Fontaine recalls Lux as "the most naked person with clothes on he had ever seen" (75), and finally after the girls' death, their bedrooms are described as a "sacked seraglio" (222), a specifically non-Western term for the sequestered female living quarters of Ottoman households. The seraglio as a cultural signifier conjures up images of mystery and secrecy and in particular hidden, veiled or unknowable women. It is also associated with sexually active women, but sexual activity that is condoned and permitted by controlling masculinities. The seraglio, like the image of the veil, fetishizes the unknowability of the feminine. In Pamuk's novel, the returned or invited male gaze speaks to fallen modesty; to be knowable is to be diminished, worthless. After Trip has sex with Lux on the football field he loses interest in her immediately. Kemal's passion for Füsun is predicated on her unavailability, initially because of his engagement and thereafter because of her marriage. Contrary to Brooks' Freudian epistemophilia, the men in these novels do not *want* to know the girls. Freudian epistemophilia is presented as fundamentally unattainable *and* actually

undesirable. Conceptually, the epistemophilic project frees the masculine subject from culpability, because if the desire to possess is predicated on a desire for knowledge it is not specifically, but only coincidentally, misogynistic. The culpability is redirected to the feminine, which is dismissed for not rewarding the epistemophilic project with knowledge. But the masculine subjects in these two novels specifically occlude the feminine, resisting any notion that the objects of their affection might be any more than objects in general. By appropriating and curating the minutiae of the lives of these women, and later by restricting the access of other subjective gazes to these artefacts, the male protagonists position themselves as controlling subjects and the women as objects of collection and possession, but not of knowledge. Instead, the inaccessible feminine is reified and venerated, used as a mirror in which the boys can admire their own fidelity and sigh over the mystery of the female mind, in which they patently do not believe. The taxonomic projects at the heart of these novels are fundamentally narcissistic appropriations of power, the women ciphers of masculine self-projection, and a useful frame to add at this point is the distinction between what Cavell terms "knowing" and "acknowledgment" in his work *Knowing and Acknowledgment*. If we allow the body as an epistemophilic project, with knowledge being fundamentally unattainable, it is the absence of Cavellian acknowledging that makes the protagonists culpable here. In other words, the narrators seek to know the bodies of their beloveds in their absence through objects of association, but fail to acknowledge the subjectivity of the embodied individuals in question, because to acknowledge such would be to liberate the self from the status of object. The epistemophilic project, then, is a valid paradigm, but only for certain values of the term knowledge, and acknowledgment undermines this form of knowledge, as subjectivity and interior life defy objectification.

4. Actors

11 Interestingly, though, while neither narrative voice acknowledges the interiority of the girls, their struggling subjectivity seeps into the narrative at various points, nonplussing the narrators. Perhaps the most obvious example of this intrusion is the final point of contact between the novels: the manner of the girls' deaths. The very title of the novel *The Virgin Suicides* invites the reader to focus on this death, on the vacation of the girls' bodies, and so in a sense to focus on the bodies themselves, a focus that increases the sense of narcissistic appropriation. While the narrative voice continually laments the boys' ignorance of the girls' suffering, and their inability to rescue the girls, the focus on the manner of the girls' death undercuts this apparent (and apparently sincere) regret. Tellingly, late in the novel, the narrative concludes "We had never dreamed the girls might love us back [...] Thinking back, we decided the girls had been trying to talk to us all along, to elicit our help, but we'd been too infatuated to listen" (192-3). The decisive association here between affection/infatuation on the part of the boys and presumed silence and passivity on the part of the girls clearly positions the object of affection as an object in its whole sense. The bodily focus that persists throughout the boys' discussions of the girls, particularly clear in their admission that they had never differentiated between the sisters, positions love as a form of ownership or desired ownership. In this respect, the boys' relationship with the girls is indeed one of collection, and their memorial one of curatorship, and the girls' suicides moves them from one category to the other without altering the relational stance of the boys in any

significant way. The girls' deaths are rationalised in a range of ways through the novel's lens, both mythological and mysterious. The boys enact the external focalization of Genette's narrative perspective, "in which the hero performs in front of us without our ever being allowed to know his thoughts or feelings" (Genette, 190). In the case of *The Virgin Suicides*, the boys are not the hero, but the lens; that is to say, they follow the girls like a camera, and always know less than the objects of their gaze, which lacunae translate to the audience too. This accounts in part for the intense visuality of the narrative, and for its relative success as a film adaptation (Coppola 1999).

12 On the one hand, the boys continue to reject the concept of the girls' agency, with both the boys and the town at large puzzling over their decisions. The last sister, Mary, is deemed to display "no evidence of a psychiatric illness", and in fact to be "a relatively well-adjusted adolescent" (227). This diagnosis takes place after the suicide of Mary's four sisters and is uttered by the same doctor who found no evidence of distress in Cecilia, the first of the girls to die. As such, it rings distinctly false, as do the repeated avowals by the narrative voice in the novel's present, and the boys and the town's older citizens in the remembered past that the suicides were unaccountable. There is a continued refusal to see the girls as agents, an intense and intentional mystifying of their actions, which grows steadily into a collective imagination of victimhood, the mythologizing of their fate (and it is a distinctly singularised fate; the three dates of suicide may as well be one — indeed, in the film version it is shortened to two, heightening the conflation of their identities). Late in the novel the girls are explicitly cast as mythical figures, harbingers of suburban decline: "Something sick at the heart of the country had infected the girls [...] The Lisbon girls became a symbol of what was wrong with the country" (226), and later "Everyone we spoke to dated the demise of our neighbourhood from the suicides of the Lisbon girls [...] the girls were seen not as scapegoats but as seers" (238). Nearby in the text are references to "clairvoyance" (238), "decadence" (238), "the whited sepulchre" (239). In the closing pages the girls are called "too powerful to live among us, too self-concerned, too visionary, too blind" (242). Interestingly, in the film adaptation, these references are made at the beginning, which casts the whole film as emerging in the shadow of this mythology. In both the novel and the film, the boys dismiss the vitality of the girls, flashes of which are visible in their behaviour throughout the narrative. By removing them from the realm of the living, the imperfect, the active, the narrative pinions the girls as objects of myth and mystery. The use of mythic language to objectify the girls grows more pronounced in the later parts of the novel, but its resonances are present from the beginning. The novel's title, *The Virgin Suicides*, operates in a number of symbolic paths. In the world of the novel, the title is taken from a song by the fictional band Cruel Crux, about the loss of virginity. However, even within the text, that already fictional connection is further destabilised, as it is not in the boys' Record of Physical Evidence, nor mentioned in any of the musical scenes. Instead, it is reported as part of the "research" conducted by Linda Perl, a reporter who broadcasts a story on the deaths, and subsequently writes a book about them. The narrators are dismissive of Perl and the media in general, and her "research" (presented in scare quotes in the text) is treated as sensationalism, so the status of the song is at best murky, positioning the title as itself contested. Most obviously, the association of the girls with purity, clairvoyance and nature, as well as recurrent images of light and flame, align the symbolic virgins of the title with the Vestal Virgins, guardians of the Delphic oracle (which is consonant with Eugenides'

widespread use of classical Greek imagery elsewhere in his work). Indeed, the mythologizing force of the narrative works to make the sisters aggregate virgins, as it were, robbing Lux of even the renegade bodily autonomy she tries to lay claim to through her sexual activity, as if virginity were a function of (male) perception rather than action. In mythic or archetypal terms, the sisters are also associated with death not just through their own suicides but through the various deaths and sickening in the town, from the fish flies that mark Cecilia's first suicide attempt through the outbreak of Dutch Elm disease that claims the town's trees and the poisoning of the town's lake, figured grotesquely in the Asphyxiation-themed coming-out party at the novel's close, but also encompassing also the rather more unnerving cemetery workers' strike that delays burials during the whole process of the suicides, beginning four weeks before Cecilia's first attempt. The girls become part of this thanatic system, again imagined as objects of physical decay rather than active or desiring subjects. Associatively linked with the natural and economic decline of the area, the girls function as objects in a memorialising collection, brought under the controlling gaze of the adolescent male citizens.

13 While the suicides of the Lisbon sisters occupy almost the whole of the novel, Füsun's death is much less of a narrative focus. Her death occurs late in *The Museum of Innocence* and may be suicide, although it is slightly less clear-cut than the Lisbon sisters' deaths. Füsun's death is less dominant in the narrative of *The Museum of Innocence* than the five suicides in *The Virgin Suicides* and is, in the end, only a short passage. Of note, however, regarding the brief scene of her death is the language in which it is discussed. Kemal recalls that "driving at 105 kilometers an hour, headed for the 105-year-old plane tree, she seemed to know exactly what she was doing" (488). A few lines later, though, he recalls "Füsun knew she was about to die, and during those two or three seconds she told me with her pleading eyes that she didn't really want to, that she would cling to life as long as she could, hoping for me to save her" (488). Needless to say, he does not save her, but it is interesting to note that even after she drives her car into a tree *with all the appearance of destructive intention*, Kemal cannot conceive of Füsun having sufficient agency to commit suicide. Rather like the boys of *The Virgin Suicides*, Kemal works hard to rationalise or deconstruct the evidence of her agency, repositioning her as a victim instead of an originator of destructive action; an object can suffer harm but cannot cause it. From the accident report that follows, Kemal's memory of Füsun's dying appeal also seems improbable, since her skull was crushed by the impact. Importantly, though, the text goes on to note that "all the rest of her beautiful being — her sad eyes; her miraculous lips; her large pink tongue; her velvet cheeks; her shapely shoulders; the silky skin of her throat, chest, neck and belly; her long legs, her delicate feet, the sight of which had always made me smile; her slender, honey-hued arms, with their moles and downy brown hair; the curves of her buttocks; and her soul, which had always drawn me to her — remained intact" (489). Like the coroner's report in *The Virgin Suicides*, Kemal's reduction of Füsun to her body parts, location of her soul within that list and relation of her essence to his appraisals of it reduces her to an absolute object, subjected to his gaze and constitutive of his own self-identification. Evocative of the long poetic tradition of a lover celebrating the body of his beloved, Kemal's enumeration is rendered taxonomic and rather sinister — more the listing of trophies than the praise of a living creature — by the juxtaposition of Füsun's bodily attributes with her violent death, and by the unrelieved fragmentation of his description, mirrored in the fragmentation of Füsun's body in the accident. By this reckoning,

Füsun's is not a mournable life as Butler conceives it; she is not recognisable as a subjective actor, but constitutive only of the subjecthood of her mourner, which is to say that she is mournable and memorialised not as a person but as a body. Kemal survives the accident and mourns Füsun as the embodied loss of his innocence. The Grosse Point boys grow up into indifferent adulthood and keep the girls, veiled, unknown and safely circumscribed by and into objects.

5. Conspirators

14 The novels both deal quite clearly with the objectification and silencing of the feminine subject by the men and social structures around them. Beyond this, however, the novels also interrogate the complicity of the bystander, specifically in the operations of text. In this respect, and by way of a conclusion to this essay, the dynamics of power involved in reading merit attention. The complex curatorial and taxonomic positions discussed here reflect hierarchies of power and subjectivity, hierarchies that are also at play in the relationships between reader, writer and text. The position of the reader throughout both narratives is a particularly contested one, although the authorial identity is notably compromised in Pamuk's novel. In discussing these dynamics, we might usefully invoke the triad of addressees proposed by Phelan and Rabinowitz (2008), distinguishing between the often-overlapping authorial audience, narrative audience and narrattee. In *The Virgin Suicides*, all three are one, because the narrattee is unidentified and implicitly embodied in the reader. This position is further complicated by the novel's film adaptation, which puts the viewer in a decidedly voyeuristic position by refusing to allow the viewer's perspective to widen beyond the narrative's voyeurism of the girls. While in the novel, the mediated sense of a guided exhibit positions the reader as witness to the gaze of the narrators, on the screen, the reader is *part* of that gaze. In *The Museum of Innocence*, the same overlap is functionally in place through most of the narrative as the addressed "you" moves between collective visitors to the museum and a particular individual, later identified as the writer himself. This shift in the latter part of the narrative destabilises the reader's complicity, where the consistent direct address of *The Virgin Suicides* further implicates the reader in the narrative distancing of the sisters. For readers and viewer of *The Virgin Suicides*, the sense is unavoidable that one has been manipulated into the position of voyeur, constantly aware of the aporetic cracks in which the Lisbon sisters might have told a different story. The discomfort of this voyeurism is heightened by the persistence of voyeuristic imagery at an operational level in both the novel and the film — the constant references to and images of the boys watching the girls and the neighbours watching each other, all of which combine to create a suffocating atmosphere of surveillance — and the reader's complicity is highlighted by various direct addresses and appeals to look. Having said that, the novel also gestures beyond its own borders, referring to information unavailable to the reader with such phrases as "as you can see in this school photograph" (Pamuk, 6), which of course the reader cannot see, and numerous similar references throughout the novel. In ways, this works to ease the sense of being both the reader and the conspirator. By contrast, in *The Museum of Innocence*, the reader is narratively exculpated from Kemal's objectification of Füsun by the appearance of the writer in the text, but then becomes part of a separate kind of memorial, characterised by both narrative access to Kemal's recollection and physical access to his curation of Füsun's physical effects. This physical access is two-fold, given

that it is fictional within the reading of the novel (one would not of course read the novel in the Museum), but actual in the sense of the Museum's physical existence. This duality blurs the boundaries of the reader's responsibility, then, in a way that *The Virgin Suicides* does not, because the reader in the real world is simultaneously distanced from Kemal's problematic memorialisation *and* invited to his actual memorial. In this way, the reader is invited to become complicit in perpetuating the narcissistic appropriation of a woman's life and death. *The Virgin Suicides*, then, offers the uncomfortable sense of being trapped into voyeuristic epistemology of the body as object, while *The Museum of Innocence* presents the arguably more discomfiting option of choosing or rejecting it. Pamuk's permeation of the boundaries between writer, text, reader and world invite a consideration of the liminality of moral culpability in the dismissal of subjectivity — to what extent is his refusal to accept Füsun's agency a contributing factor in her death? — while Eugenides, though not implicating the boys in the girls' deaths as such, imagines the dangerous temptation of adolescent nostalgia and emotional stasis. While Kemal is cast as potentially complicit in the death of his beloved, the problem with the obsessive memorialisation of the Lisbon sisters is that it impedes the adult development of the boys. The two novels offer different aspects of the same cataloguing instincts —– dangerous to others, and dangerous to the self. The taxonomic projects at the centre of these novels are a taxonomy of absence, a project that seeks to categorise rather than to understand. The testimonies of the curators are remarkably self-focused, pointedly incurious about the interior lives of their objects, interested only in the girls' effects on their own developing masculine subjectivities. Both novels portray the desire to turn a person into a collection, to turn a life to sentimental purposes and engage with the world from a narcissistic, even solipsistic perspective. Both novels, in the end, examine the ways in which memory and testimony as we see them here can become another means of controlling the unruly bodies of girls growing into women. Knowing their minds is much less important than possessing their bodies, literally or figuratively, and the memorialising of a beloved becomes an excavation of one's own adolescent self, a project of anthropology of our own experience.

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ABSTRACTS

The narrators of Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides* (1991) and Orhan Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence* (2008) spend their time obsessively gathering, curating and categorising objects associated with the objects of their affection. Talking about his novel, Pamuk argued that "the desire to gather objects is central to the human heart", and in both of these novels, the male narrators react to the deaths of their beloveds by memorialising them in the form of object collections. The collections — one a group of "exhibits" and one a catalogue of the contents of a museum — serve both as a reminder of the beloved(s) and as a narrative aid, and are displayed to the unspecified "You", the witness of the boys' investigation in *The Virgin Suicides* and the museum visitor in *The Museum of Innocence*. In both cases, the collections are held up for investigation by the reader as proof of the narrator's love. Both narrators obscure the subjectivity of their beloveds by confining them to the sum of the objects collected, presenting an essentially narcissistic projection of the self on to a muted, virginal other. I argue that the obsessive need for testimony demonstrated by both narrative voices reflects a fundamental incapacity to see the female other as a subject, drawing the reader, as witness, into the position of voyeur. By offering a post-mortem memorialisation of this kind, the narrators appropriate the image of their beloved(s), re-presenting them as objects among objects, albeit still the object of mystery and obsessive fascination. Exploring the use of visual touchstones (fictional in *The Virgin Suicides*, but real in *The Museum of Innocence*, which opened in Istanbul in 2009), I take Stanley Cavell's idea of acknowledgement and Judith Butler's theory of mournable lives to discuss memory, subjectivity and power in the recollection of the beloved dead.

Les narrateurs du roman de Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Virgin Suicides* (1991), et du roman de Orhan Pamuk, *The Museum of Innocence* (2008), passent leur temps à réunir, classer et exposer des objets en lien avec des êtres aimés. En parlant de son roman, Pamuk a dit que « le désir de réunir des objets est au centre du cœur humain ». Dans les deux romans, les narrateurs masculins réagissent à la mort de leurs aimées en les mémorialisant à travers des collections d'objets. Ces collections, l'un constituant un ensemble d'« expositions », l'autre un catalogue d'objets dans un musée,

permettent de se souvenir de l'être aimé et servent de soutien narratif ; elles sont exposées au regard d'une personne non spécifiée (« You »), témoin de l'enquête des garçons dans *The Virgin Suicides,* et un visiteur du musée dans *The Museum of Innocence.* Dans les deux cas, les collections sont données au lecteur pour qu'il les étudie comme autant de preuves de l'amour du narrateur. Les deux narrateurs obvient la subjectivité de leurs aimées en les réduisant à un ensemble d'objets collectés, présentant une projection d'un Moi essentiellement narcissique sur un Autre virginal réduit au silence. Cette contribution montre que le besoin obsessif de témoigner de la part des voix narratives reflète une incapacité fondamentale de percevoir l'autre féminin comme un sujet, invitant le lecteur, comme témoin, à adopter la position d'un voyeur. En proposant ces mémorialisations post-mortem, les narrateurs s'approprient une image de leur aimée, et les représentent comme objets au sein d'objets, même si elles demeurent néanmoins un objet mystérieux, provoquant une fascination qui les obsède. En explorant des points de référence visuels (fictionnels dans *The Virgin Suicides,* réels dans *The Museum of Innocence,* qui a ouvert à Istanbul en 2009), cet article s'appuie sur la notion de reconnaissance (« acknowledgment ») développée par Stanley Cavell et la théorie de Judith Butler sur les vies dont on peut porter le deuil, afin d'analyser les questions de mémoire, de subjectivité et du pouvoir du ressouvenir des êtres aimés disparus.

INDEX

Mots-clés: corps, objet, sujet, mémoire, mémorial, genre, sexualité, mort, suicide, Pamuk Orhan, Eugenides Jeffrey
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